

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS  
DAKOTA COUNTY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA

Minutes of the City Council Work Session  
Tuesday, February 21, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Levine called the work session to order at 5:01 p.m. Councilmembers Lorberbaum, Mazzitello, Miller, and Paper were present.

Staff in attendance included City Administrator Cheryl Jacobson, Police Chief Kelly McCarthy, Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek, Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson, Finance Director Kristen Schabacker and City Clerk Christine Lusian.

POLICE/CITY HALL SITE SECURITY AND BUILDING NEEDS UPDATE

Chief Kelly McCarthy opened the discussion with a summary presentation on the council directed development of shelf ready plans for the expansion and renovation of the city's municipal campus which includes the police department and city administration/city hall.

Chief McCarthy reviewed the project's history including the initial space needs assessment completed in 2020 and presented to the city council in the spring of 2021. She reiterated that the city continues to work with CNH Architects for the continued assessment and development of plans and that certain assumptions such as the health and safety of the community and staff is paramount, and bound by the guardrails of wise financial stewardship; and that the city wants to maintain local control of police and city services.

Staff presented a Plan B overall schematic site plan that expands the campus to the west of the current police and city hall building. It was noted that the solution includes compliance with ADA requirements, about 5,100 square feet of garage space which includes nine parking spaces for police squads, internal work and storage space for police department work functions, and much need HVAC improvements such as proper ventilation. She noted that Plan B fully addresses security issues throughout the building as well as health and privacy concerns within the police department.

Chief McCarthy stated that before proceeding with the Plan B, the next logical step is to start with soil samples. The Chief noted that if soil sample results were favorable and the expansion could be built in the proposed location, that building plan development could then move forward.

Councilor Paper asked how the Dakota County Sheriff could use the space if the city contracted police services with them.

Chief McCarthy replied that the Sheriffs' office would use the space in the same manner as the police department. And noted that the building would essentially function as a western sub-station for the Dakota County Sheriffs office.

Councilmember Miller asked if the solar field would remain if the building was expanded to the as proposed under Plan B. The group agreed that it should stay, but unsure if it could be installed on the roof and if so, how that would look.

Mayor Levine asked for clarification on the proposed square footage of Plan A and Plan B in addition to the number of police department personnel when the building was built and currently.

Chief McCarthy reviewed the building square footage and stated that the current city hall is about 18,000 square feet with approximately 14,900 square feet of net usable space of which about 9,000 square feet is administration and 7,000 square feet for police. Plan A provides approximately 23,000 square feet of net usable space. Plan B includes 34,536 square feet of net usable space of which about 13,000 square feet is administration and 16,000 square feet for the police department.

Chief McCarthy noted that the Police Department has 13 employees when the building was built in the mid-80s and has 23 total staff now.

Chief McCarthy shared a schematic drawing of the floor plan for both the police department and city hall showing a potential layout for the city hall-administration space, noting that the former council chambers could be converted into community space or education space, which is in high demand within the community and for the operation of the city.

Mayor Levine asked about the cost of construction and what both Plan A and Plan B might cost.

Chief McCarthy stated that in 2021 Plan A was estimated to cost approximately \$4.2 million. Using construction forecasts and a per square foot amount of \$469-\$500, Plan B has an estimated cost of \$17 million.

Mayor Levine asked about city operated community space and noted that she was under the impression that the community space at the fire station was not being used. She noted that she is hesitant about adding community space and wants to be careful about the perception of overbuilding. She added that the fire station seems overbuilt for the city.

Staff clarified the use of meeting space at city hall and the fire station and stated that the fire station community or training room is actually used by the fire department for personnel training and meetings; noting that the department has brought Fire Fighter 1 training in-house and those classes are held within that space. Chief McCarthy stated that the police department holds department training there, as well as Public Works and that public parking at the station is limited and can be an issue.

Councilor Miller noted the cost of \$8.1 million for the fire station as comparison.

Mayor Levine asked about the annual bond payment amount for the fire station bonds.

Finance Director Kristen Schabacker noted that the city issued \$7 million in bonds for the fire station and that they are 15-year bonds with an interest rate of 2.35% and have an annual repayment amount of approximately \$620,000 to \$625,000.

Staff and council discussed the desire for and timing of public engagement on the proposed project.

Mayor Levine questioned conducting public engagement on the police department plans and whether that was needed. She noted that engagement on certain elements of the city hall plans would make sense. She cautioned about selling the plans, stating that selling the police department was easier than selling the rest, noting the administrative space must be justified.

Councilor Lorberbaum mentioned the proposed West St. Paul community center as a potential addition of useable community space, suggesting that the public/community space within city hall wouldn't be as urgent if the community center were built.

Mayor Levine clarified that the West St. Paul community center would be geared more towards recreation, if it moves forward. Levine pointed out that while the community supports the needs of police, fire, and emergency services, the council as a group wants to make sure each expense involved in a new campus is justified and added that great work space reflects the community and also critical for recruiting and retaining high quality officers and staff.

Councilor Mazzitello suggested to get the soil borings first and go from there. He inquired about the value of the city hall building currently, explaining that the rule of thumb is if the value is less than half, best practice is to tear down and build new. He pointed out that an improved police space is an urgent need and should be prioritized.

The Council and Chief McCarthy reiterated the importance of keeping city hall and the police department together in one building.

Councilor Miller excused himself.

Councilor Mazzitello reviewed that there was consensus that staff should move forward with soil borings, but that did not mean that he favors one plan or another at this time. He suggested it could be worth hiring a third-party consultant to act as an owner's representative and to assist with community engagement.

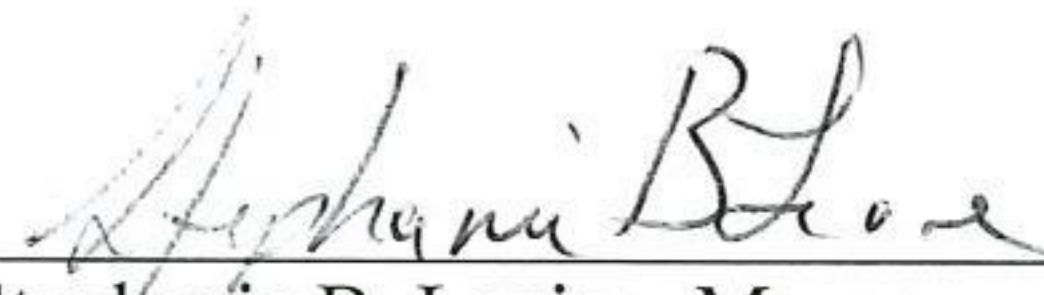
Staff were directed to proceed with soil borings to understand if Plan B is an option.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Levine adjourned the meeting at 6:22 p.m.

ATTEST:

  
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Christine Lusian, City Clerk

  
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Stephanie B. Levine, Mayor